

Nonfiction reaction assignment



“ Salvation” by Langston Hughes “ Who Will Light the Incense When Mother’s Gone? ” By Andrew Lam Nonfiction Reaction University of Phoenix ENG/125
Jill Greene Nonfiction Reaction “ Salvation” by Langston Hughes Langston Hughes, author of the nonfiction short story “ Salvation,” was born James Mercer Langston Hughes on February 1, 1902 to Carrie and James Hughes in Joplin Missouri (New World Encyclopedia, 2008). Langston Hughes was among the principle figures of the Harlem Renaissance. He is a major influence to writers and poets of different races and creeds.

His writings, inspired by the rhythms and language of the black church and blues and jazz music of his era, send messages of equity, harmony, and unity. Hughes believed music to be the true expression of the black spirit. In Hughes’ nonfiction story, “ Salvation,” he writes about his salvation from sin that was instead an abandonment of his belief in Jesus. The story begins with the revival at his Auntie Reed’s church. Hughes was told: When he becomes saved he would see a light, and something would happen inside. Jesus would come into his life and God would be with him from then on. He would be able to see, hear, and feel Jesus in his soul. Hughes, 1940, p. 351) During the revival that night the children were brought to the front of the church. At the end of the sermon the preacher asked the children enter the fold of Jesus and save their soles from sin. Some of the children went right away. People of the church prayed for the other children until they went to the altar. Hughes did not go because he was waiting to see Jesus and the light. Hughes and Westley were the only children left. Westley became tired and went up to the altar to save his sole from sin. Hughes was still waiting to see the light and Jesus. The congregation continued to pray for Hughes.

Hughes was waiting to see Jesus. Jesus never came. Hughes began to wonder why he could not see Jesus and what would happen to Westley for taking Jesus' name in vain and lying in the church. He finally rose and went to the church altar to join the other children. The congregation began to rejoice with shouts of Amen. That night in bed he cried. His aunt thought his crying was because the Holy Ghost had come into his life, and he had seen Jesus. He was crying because the Holy Ghost had not come into his life, he had not seen Jesus, and he could not tell her of his lies (Hughes, 1940, p. 352).

He could not tell his aunt he no longer believes that there is a Jesus. In this nonfiction story Hughes uses irony to show that no matter how bad a person wants something to happen, chances are that something may not happen. Hughes was told that he would see a light and Jesus. Jesus does not come. This causes Hughes to doubt his salvation and religion. Hughes has to give in to the painful truth that he would not see a light or Jesus. As the preacher sang of “ the ninety and nine safe in the fold,” Langston could not help but believe he was the “ one little lamb left out in the cold” (Hughes, 1940, p. 51). This song was a comparison of the children to lambs. The children were lambs, innocent and with a need to be led to Jesus. Within this flock Hughes and Westley were the strays that needed to be led back to the right path to Jesus. These boys came to the altar for the wrong reasons. Hughes demonstrates that temptation still exists, much like the temptation of the apple in Eden. Hughes gives in to the temptation of lying about seeing Jesus. This causes Hughes to doubt the existence of Jesus because “ he did not come to help him” (Hughes, 1940, p. 352).

This story reminds the reader of the pressure that adults can unknowingly place on children. "Who Will Light the Incense When Mother's Gone?" by Andrew Lam Andrew Lam, author of the nonfiction short story "Who Will Light the Incense When Mother's Gone?" was born in 1964 in South Vietnam. He came to the United States in 1975 at the age of 11. The nonfiction short story "Who Will Light Incense When Mother's Gone?" is about the loss of old traditions. When Lam's mother turns 70, she and her sister wonder who will keep the tradition and light the incense to the dead when each sister is dead.

Their children have become Americanized and do not want to keep the tradition. Their grandchildren will not because they do not understand this tradition. The ladies assume that the ritual will end with them. The children, born in America, know nothing of their ancestors in Vietnam. The ritual consists of lighting joss sticks at the ancestral altar. Then talking to the ghosts and saying prayers to the spirits of dead ancestors asking for protection. Lam uses imagery about the incense slowly burning and his mother mumbling indecipherably to dead people to show how this tradition is old and nonsensical to him.

Lam's mother is afraid that he has become too American. She believes that he has become a cowboy. "A cowboy in Vietnamese estimation is a rebel who, as in the spaghetti westerns leaves town??? the communal life??? to ride alone into the sunset" (Lam, 2003, p. 1078). Lam uses metaphors, cowboy, to describe how his mother views him. Lam expresses his fear to be left alone in the world when his mother leaves, but hesitates to take up her

traditions. Lam's mother wants her children to be Americans, to finish high school, go to college, and receive employment in the field of study.

She would also like them to keep Vietnamese traditions. Lam believes he and his mother live in two different worlds. " His is a world of travel, writing, and public speaking; hers is a world of consulting the Vietnamese horoscope, attending Buddhist temple on the day of her parents death anniversaries, and telling stories of the past" (Lam, 2003, p. 1078). When Lam considers the traditions that will be lost, he has feelings of guilt. " I wish I could assure my mother that, after she is gone, each morning I would light incense for her and all the ancestor spirits before her, but I cannot" (Lam, 2003, p. 078). His mother and other Vietnamese mothers connect him and his generation to the traditional past. When she is gone this will be lost. " I fear she'll leave me stranded in America, becoming more American than I expected, a lonely cowboy cursed with amnesia" (Lam, 2003, p. 1078). Both of these stories, " Salvation" and " Who Will Light Incense When Mother's Gone? " are about loss. Hughes writes about the loss of his faith and Lam writes about the loss of his family tradition. I understand these feelings of loss. Traditions that my family did when I was younger, I no longer do as an adult.

When gathering together with family and talk of these times, one begins to wonder why these times had to stop. Our lives have gone in different directions, and we no longer make time for extended family outings.

Nonfiction stories such as these bring back memories to the readers.

Everyone has a time when they have lost faith in something or questioned the loss of a family tradition. While reading these stories one can imagine themselves becoming a part of the story. Imagination is more useful for the

reader. I believe that imagination is already a part of nonfiction writings. The writer is using imagination while writing about the past.

The writer has to imagine as he writes. References Hughes, L. (2011).

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